

# 2011-09 Focus on Members

***This month's Focus is on Al Porter, educator, dedicated volunteer and distinguished rider.***

"Come again, come again," said the leader. That's exactly the encouragement I needed to return to Etra for another 40 mile spin around central Jersey. His name was Norman, but at the time I was unaware of his iconic stature in the club. All I knew was that I had managed to finish my first club ride... and that I was no longer quite so intimidated by the dazzling bikes, funny shoes, and all that spandex. Later in the season I traded up from my thrift shop road bike and Raleigh hybrid, and by the following year I was courageous enough to try those pedals and shoes.



My wife, Marion, liked the whole idea of group rides – especially after a serious crash while riding alone left me in sorry shape for many months. But neither of us anticipated how cycling would start to take over my life. Soon I was rearranging my schedule to protect the MWF ride slot, and then came a backup bike, spare parts, more of that spandex, and even a mirror. I tried to explain the passion to my family, friends, and colleagues, talking about the new friends, scenic roads, great conversation, and terrific exercise, but I soon realized that my explanations were inadequate. The fulfillment was far more complex and truly transforming.

When I heard about the Bike Exchange I decided to check it out. A hand injury (nothing to do with bikes; I seem to have a tendency to injure myself) interrupted my efforts to contribute as a repair volunteer, but I discovered that I really enjoyed helping customers. So I get there as often as I can, each time leaving the shop with another great story about how the place is changing people's lives. That includes me; it has been rewarding to be part of it all. I meet wonderful people - volunteers and customers - and feel a sense of accomplishment that I'm contributing in a small way to the shop's remarkable success. The club can be proud of its affiliation with the Exchange.

Now, when I travel, I try to bring a bike or rent one when we reach our destination. It lets me get around in a way that's much better than a car, and I always meet interesting local cyclists who seem more open to conversation with another biker about themselves and their city or country. Of course, I have also found a way to get my grandkids into pedaling. A modest bike from the Exchange, with a little extra work and cleaning, brings joy to their lives and gives me great riding companions. I do wonder about what I might be creating: Ian, soon to be ten, has all the lingo and constantly calls out every hazard.

I need to remind him that 'car up' doesn't have to be shouted for every vehicle, especially if we are on a divided highway!

Every once in a while I get to lead a ride. It helps me appreciate the planning and responsibility shouldered by those who do it regularly. Their service is the heart of the club. I've been fortunate to have two wonderful role models. Norman was a remarkable guy, as is Dennis, who succeeded him in leading the rides out of Etra and Allentown. We always have a great time. Lately, I have seen more new faces on rides. I hope that's a trend. And we certainly could use some more young people to whom we can say, "come again."